

University of Illinois at Springfield

Norris L. Brookens Library

Archives/Special Collections

William “Bill” Crook, Jr. Memoir

Crook, William “Bill” Jr.

Interview and memoir
digital audio file, 68 min., 23 pp.

UIS Alumni Sage Society

Crook attended Sangamon State University taking art and graphics design courses. His applied studies project in 1981 was the creation of a book containing copies of his original artwork and was sold at Shadid’s Book Mart in downtown Springfield. He is a local artist that sold his work at the Old State Capitol Art Fair in downtown Springfield over thirty years.

Interview by Cullom Davis, 2010

OPEN

No collateral file

Archives/Special Collections LIB 144
University of Illinois at Springfield
One University Plaza, MS BRK 140
Springfield IL 62703-5407

© 2010, University of Illinois Board of Trustees

Narrator: William "Bill" Crook, Jr.
Date: June 7, 2010
Place: Springfield, IL
Interviewer: Cullom Davis

Q. This is an oral history interview on June 7, 2010 with William Crook, Jr. and the interviewer is Cullom Davis. We're going to be talking, Bill, about in particular about your relationship with Sangamon State University and then UIS. But I want a tiny bit of background. You're a native Springfieldian.

A. Yes, I was born in February 1, 1949 in Springfield, and my dad was born in Springfield, too, in 1909. He moved to Springfield because his father was named the curator of the Illinois State Museum. So my grandfather moved to Springfield from Evanston, Illinois with my grandmother in 1906.

Q. So you are three generations, third generation Springfield?

A. That's right, and Springfield's been good to me.

Q. Good. You grew up in a particular neighborhood or several different neighborhoods?

A. On the southwest side, initially 1801 South Glenwood till I started first grade and then my parents moved to 1415 Wiggins Avenue. So I attended Butler Elementary School and then Franklin Junior High and Springfield High.

Q. Okay and when did you graduate from Springfield High?

A. 1967. Just as a note, the graduating class had 670 people and this year the graduating class had 330 people.

Q. Weren't you on split schedules?

A. They had it, some people would start at 7:30 in the morning and ours was not quite a split schedule.

Q. You're younger than our mutual friend Jim Krohe, aren't you?

A. One year younger, yes.

Q. Oh, only year?

A. I knew him in high school.

Q. You were friends in high school?

A. Not friends, I recognized him. He was a... he was a little bit notorious. He had a big puff of hair like Bob Dylan.

Q. He did, I know. He was a little independent.

A. Yes, he thought of himself as a free thinker, beatnik, intellectual type.

Q. Okay so up to that point, you are a normal adolescent.

A. Yes, very extremely normal. I tried to play golf for years and years and I was bad at all sports.

Q. Is that right?

A. Unfortunately hiking or walking was the only thing I could master.

Q. So you graduated in 1967 and then did you right away go to college?

A. Yes, University of Illinois engineering school, which didn't suit me too well at the time. I was good at math and science but didn't have the desire to succeed as an engineer. It just bored me to death.

Q. So you quit school?

A. I quit school

Q. Was that during your first year?

A. Second year, yes I was... it was just... it was a time of upheaval. It was during the Vietnam War and I didn't... I was having trouble in school, and I wanted to explore my own creative side.

Q. Well there was a time, and also there was a lot of unrest on campuses because the education wasn't very good then. The professors did research and didn't bother to teach you. I don't know whether they felt...

A. It was a huge school. I had nothing to compare it with really. There were huge classes but I just figured that was the way it was. But I ended up getting interested in like more like Henry David Thoreau and modern twentieth century poetry like Wallace Stevens and things like that that I had never even heard of before.

Q. That happened while you were at Illinois?

A. The freshmen year, you had a rhetoric requirement. I took a poetry class as an elective and it branched out into that, which was totally new to me. Then after the fourth semester, I just gave it up altogether. Since it wasn't working for me, I went out, I bought a Volkswagen van and I drove out to the east coast and just hung out with some people I met and wasn't very happy and wasn't getting anyplace in my life.

But eventually after three or four months, I went back to Champaign. I had friends there and reenrolled in the University of Illinois but as a graphic design major. But I had missed a year of school and so I was reclassified 1-A for the draft and then got the old induction notice very quickly. I applied to be a conscientious objector and had a little help from my minister and my church.

Q. Who was that?

A. His name was... no. I'm thinking it was Harry Heistand at Christ Episcopal Church, not Harry but there were a couple of them, similar names. Yes, I can't remember the name. But after going through the appeal process, they recognized my conscientious objector status and I ended up doing alternative service work in Portland, Maine for an alternative school that I found out about through Sangamon State University.

Q. Ok, so you used the services of the university, the library or something?

A. Well, I used a teacher as a resource who was into education and I don't think I ever set foot on the university campus. I remember what the guy looked like and I remember where he lived, but I can't remember his name.

Q. Not Jerry Storm?

A. I don't know. He had red hair.

Q. Bret Stranger?

A. No, no it wasn't him. He lived on west Governor and he had some magazines about community schools and all kinds of alternative education. So I wrote to all these different schools saying I was a conscientious objector and looking for an opportunity to do alternative service work. This one out of all the schools I wrote to, one in Maine called the... it was called the... Let me think. I can't remember the name of the school, but it wasn't much of a school at all. It was a student run operation experimenting with very many preschools.

The structure was so loose; people weren't even attending classes. It was...I didn't get any pay; I basically had to just get a part time job to support myself. It was a little community of people mostly all from Maine. After I was there about six months, ended up... the school looked like it was going down. It just wasn't really viable; they had a storefront, but the students didn't

bother to show up. So I went to Mexico. I found a drive away car through an agency that transports cars and took a car from Portsmouth N.H. to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I went with my eighteen-year-old roommate, Libby Winsor, who was supposedly the swimming instructor at this alternative school but she wasn't doing any instructing. She had never traveled at all. She had never been anyplace west of Boston, so we drove to the Pacific coast. We drove to Baton Rouge and then started hitchhiking. Three or four days later, I was on the Pacific Ocean at Bara de Navidad in the state of Jalisco, Mexico and I spent a couple months there. This was 1972, January 1972.

That was a big change in my life to go to Mexico. Neither of us knew a word of Spanish and somehow we survived and had a big adventure. I met up with some friends of mine and we camped on the beach for awhile, and then we moved in town. I did some sign painting. This was the time I really started to develop getting interested in art. I was drawing and I just didn't know how to draw very well, but I would play in my sketchbook and work with pen and ink and colored inks.

I had a real strong interest in cartooning without really knowing much about drawing. My interest was in editorial cartoons, political and social satire. To make a long story short, I ended up getting hepatitis and going in the hospital. My parents flew me home from Oklahoma. I didn't know what I had but then I got a diagnosis of hepatitis. They flew me home; I went in Memorial Hospital and spent maybe a week there hooked up to an IV.

They said, "There's no cure for hepatitis. Just be sure you plenty of nutrition," and it went away. Then I moved briefly back to Maine. By that time, the school year was over. There didn't seem to be any future there so I moved to Wisconsin and spent a year in Wisconsin and then moved to Springfield about 1973. Then I met people from Sangamon State; there was an active community that I fell into about that time.

Q. Why don't you mention some of those people who were important to you?

A. All right, Dick and Mary Johnston, Ralph and Jeanne Stone and they were involved... there were two storefront type of operations downtown. One was called the Spoon River Coop bookstore, and it was in the 100 block of south Fourth Street between Washington and Adams. That was a delightful place; you could just drop in any time and meet people, all kinds of stuff going on. I remember painting a sign for them that was like a little sandwich board that sat out on the sidewalk. I've still got it out in my garage of all things.

Q. That is a relic.

A. Yes, yes, that's what I thought. It was fairly good artwork.

Q. I know; I saw it at some point. You mentioned another...

A. The other place is called, it was called Rudolph's Bean; it was also known as the Energy Center and I don't know what was the first name. There was a guy named Steve Rudolph there; he started it. Some of the people who were involved in that were Harvey Koplowe; he managed it at one point and booked entertainment for it. That was in the 600 block of East Capital. I remember painting a sign for them. I had a reputation as a sign painter and somehow I liked that.

At one point, I painted a mural for the window of a record store at... what was it? At the corner of Monroe and Walnut; the building has been torn down. The store was called Earth Sounds, and it was owned and operated by Lee Winkler and John Kessler, two high school friends of mine. I painted the front windows in a mural design with some cartoon characters. That was my first job I ever, the first sign painting job I ever did, that store window. This was the summer of 1971 before I went to Maine and Mexico.

Q. He didn't later go into woodworking, did he?

A. Yes, that's Winkler's place on west... Old Jacksonville Road.

A. He did a lot of work for us.

Q. He's still around?

A. Yes, I have known him since grade school, high school.

Q. I'm sorry, that place was called Earth Songs?

A. Earth Sounds.

Q. Oh, Earth Sounds, ok. So you from that job, you began to have a career as a sign painter.

A. Yes, I actually did and even made up a name for my business called the Eyeball Sign Company, but it faded out pretty fast. I remember doing a few other jobs for some short-lived recycling center, and I don't know what else, I can't remember.

I also did some posters, did one for the King Harvest Food Co-op, maybe more than one and some other little businesses or for friends around Springfield. Let me see, I was hanging around Sangamon State. I didn't really have any desire to go to classes. I got married in 1975 to a woman named Jane Lerner, who I met in Champaign.

Q. Werner or Lerner?

A. Lerner (LERNER). We met in 1974 in Champaign, got married a year later. She was from Skokie and moved to Springfield. Then a year later in 1976 our first baby, Jennifer, was born. A couple years after that I ended up enrolling at Sangamon State.

I'd gotten, I was interested in cartooning and I'd even tried self-publishing some comic books that I'd drawn. I did one called "The Adventures of Vachel Lindsay" that was like a mini-comic where you take a sheet of 8 ½ by 11 paper and fold it in quarters so you get four sides, four pages on each sheet of paper out of it.

I was interested in Vachel Lindsay as a visionary, romantic poet that had a positive view of Springfield and saw the possibilities of life here. Before that just for a couple of years in 1973, 1974, I also helped put out a little comic called "Kino Eye" with some Sangamon State people: Larry Sombke was one and Steve Brown was the other person that was involved with that, and we put out maybe four issues of that.

Q. What was the spelling of that?

A. KINO (KINO), it was... the name came from some Russian film maker, a 1920s filmmaker. Larry, he ended up graduating in the Public Affairs Reporting program at Sangamon State. Steve Brown was a very creative guy, and he ended up moving to San Francisco and then Belgium. Then the last thing I heard he said he was moving to Mexico City, and then he disappeared and haven't heard a word from him in twenty-five, thirty years. He was a very good artist and a musician and would try anything, very much a creative spirit. He inspired me a lot.

Q. So these were among your friends.

A. These are the people I met and these are the people that hung around at the Spoon River Co-op.

Q. Sure and that prompted you to take a course?

A. What happened was I was out at the school wandering around in the art department over there and met David Robinson, who was an instructor in printmaking. Maybe I had some of my drawings, I might have showed them to him; I can't remember. He said, "Well why don't you take a class? If you don't want to enroll, just come and sit in, I don't care."

He was very accommodating, and I really didn't know anything about the art of so-called printmaking. I just knew that if you wanted something copied, you put it on a Xerox machine. So I ended up taking an introduction to printmaking class and liked it. Then I think I enrolled as a full time student or maybe a part time student. At some point, I got a scholarship to pay my tuition. I think it was called the Bruce Magidson Memorial Scholarship in art.

Q. Sure, sure. You never knew him?

A. Well I met him. He was there in the early 1970s, so I had met him.

Q. Sure.

A. Didn't really connect with him too much, but I thought Dave Robinson was a real good instructor because he had a gentle approach. He didn't have a big, strong agenda. He would like encourage you to do whatever interested you the most. I did silk screen printing and etching, first etching I had ever done.

Then I experimented with this technique of making photo engraving plates, which is a commercial plate making process that involves shooting a photographic negative from a line drawing and then transferring that by photosensitizing a sheet of metal, used to be zinc and now they use magnesium.

But you expose this negative, which is pasted over the sensitized plate and expose it to an arc light, and it fixes the emulsion on the plate. Then you can dip it in a bath of acid, hydrochloric acid, which then eats away part of the plate. You have a relief surface that will hold the ink when it's applied with a rubber roller. That's what newspapers were printed on up until the 1970s before they were replaced by offset printing.

Q. So you learned that craft?

A. Yes, I learned how to print on paper and that's how I got started as a print maker such as it is, which it's a real... I don't even... I mean I know schools still teach it, but it seems about as outmoded as teaching parchment making or something like that.

Q. Yes.

A. I mean it is an interesting process, but man technology has just leaped so far ahead of it.

Q. So before we, and this is around 1974, 1975?

A. More like 1978, 1979. There were a few years there, like I said I had a baby in 1976 and another one in 1978. I don't know, I guess I ... maybe I thought I could actually make it as a cartoonist but I realized that even with very hard work, you couldn't really make any money. I co-published this one comic book, and my contribution was absolutely disgusting and worthless.

But the comic book itself was called "The Authentic Vision Comics." This fellow I co-produced it with was Tucker Petertel, and he was far more skilled as an artist than I was, and he lived in Champaign. All I remember is that we printed two thousand copies of this comic, and it cost us twenty five cents apiece to produce them.

We ended up selling the whole bulk of the printing run to a distributor in California that paid us thirty cents a copy, so we made five cents per each comic. Then we had to split that. We made

fifty dollars apiece approximately for months of labor. That was the last comic book I tried to do and that was in maybe 1977.

Then I got into the printmaking and just by consideration of that as an art form, seemed to be worth more money. People were willing to pay more, and I got some decent commissions around Springfield.

Q. For your inks?

A. Yes, for the drawings of architecture, yes. I think that's where my background in engineering, engineering drawing actually translated into the ability to draw a three-dimensional space and... perspective skills, which I probably already always had a little bit.

But I never had any drawing classes in high school at all. I had engineering drawing classes where you used T squares and triangles and so forth. I really liked that. Then I basically started learning to draw free hand, just got to the point where I could draw something and make it recognizable.

One of the first commissions I ever had was from the First National Bank during 1976. They put out a portfolio of historic Lincoln type buildings: the Old State Capitol, Lincoln's Home. I did a portfolio of four drawings that they packaged up very nicely and printed and gave away tens of thousands of these portfolios to their customers.

That was connected with the bicentennial year in 1976. So that really helped me get established as an artist in the community. At the same time, those same years of 1975, 1976, 1977, the "Illinois Times" newspaper got started, and I remember meeting the editor on the street. His name was Bill Friedman. There was two of them, Bill Friedman and Alan somebody or other.

Q. Alan...

A. I can't remember his name, but they were both real nice to me. I ended up getting a lot of my early drawings published in the "Illinois Times." I remember for some illustrations, they would pay five dollars apiece. I didn't make much, but I got known.

Q. It was the exposure, but exposure doesn't buy food.

A. Yes and that's where... then the first year I was in the Old Capitol Art Fair I think was 1978. Then I started selling some prints, some of the things that I was... it could have been 1979, I can't remember, but these are the years I started taking printmaking classes and experimenting with lithography and actually selling prints at this Old Capitol Art Fair. I've been in the Art Fair every year since then; it's over thirty years.

Q. So you remember probably a lot of people, but David Robinson, he was probably pretty high on your list.

A. Yes, I am grateful to Dave Robinson for introducing me to the concept of printmaking as art, while cartooning is a popular art. I've still always bridged the line between fine art and popular art. I really don't like the high pedestal that people put the fine art on because I think it's all based on just style and who you know.

With popular arts, these guys aren't even recognized. Nobody even knows their names, a lot of them. They do matchbook covers and that sort of thing. Cartoonists are like that, but the best cartoonists definitely rise to the level of fine art. I mean Al Capp and Charles Schultz and all those people. History separates the really creative, innovators from just the ones who call it a job.

Q. Okay, Al Capp and you mentioned Charles Schultz.

A. Charles Schultz but also the underground artists who really captured my imagination, Robert Crumb, Justin Green, Gilbert Shelton and S. Clay Wilson from San Francisco.. But Justin Green was from the northern suburbs of Chicago. He went to Rhode Island School of Design. I ended up corresponding with him and a lot of these people.

Q. Where there others among your friends or other art faculty at the university who talked with you regularly about this work? Then were you part of a coterie at the university?

A. Let me think; no.

Q. All right.

A. No, none of my fellow art students really shared too much interest. Nancy Ranyard was one who as actually taking art classes. She was one of the first people I met when I moved back to Springfield and I guess it was 1972 when I was first recovering from hepatitis. Another friend who also went to Sangamon State was named Charlie Blanchard.

Q. Oh sure.

A. He was a good friend of mine. I met him in about 1971, and he was one of my best friends.

Q. He was my graduate assistant my first year.

A. I still keep in touch with him.

Q. Do you?

A. Yes, he lives in Narrowsburg, New York and has a weaving studio in some little storefront in this tiny little town on the Delaware River.

Q. Nice, sweet guy.

A. Yes, I saw him just last year, last fall. I've been trying to get him to come to the Old Capitol Art Fair but you have to really register in like October and he just didn't make it. But I keep trying to get him there.

Q. So you had some friends but they weren't particularly necessarily university related. How about other faculty in art? Did you work with any of them?

A. Well I, yes, Mauri Formigoni, but I'm not even sure she was with the university at that time. She was... I would actually credit her with teaching me how to draw from life at the Springfield Art Association in 1973.

She invited me and Steve Brown to just sit in to her theater drawing classes. She was, she had this method she called the natural way to draw by Nicolaides and it was a 1930s book of technique. I looked at the book and I never really could get into doing the formal exercises. But the basic eye and hand coordination I did learn gesture drawings or one of their techniques in contour drawings.

So she got me drawing from life and that was very helpful. I don't think I ever took any class. I actually ended up modeling, doing figure drawing modeling for her classes later than that, probably in the 1980s. She taught there later in the 1980s, and I still keep in touch with her, too.

Last I heard she was living in San Miguel de Allendé, Mexico because her son is still around, at least one of her sons is still in town and I see him every once in awhile. I've spent a lot of time in Mexico and credit Mexico a lot with all my art because it's such a natural, inviting place to do landscape art.

Q. The colors and the weather?

A. The weather, consistent sunny weather, day after day after day. You don't have to worry about if it's going to be stormy or humid or anything. So I did a lot, every time I would go to Mexico I would take sketch books and fill them up and take water color paper. I had met people who had told me about San Miguel. then my wife and I and kids went there in 1988 on a train. Our kids were like nine and eleven-years-old or something like that, and we stayed for the whole summer. Found a place to rent and have gone back several times since then.

I remember when Mauri was going to... had called me up, she was in Michigan and she said, "Well I'm thinking of going to San Miguel. What do you think?" I said, "Well that would be

perfect for you, you'd love it." She did go and she did love it. I visited her down there once and she had a Great Dane dog, and I think she might have had a horse even.

She was living in the country and was doing mosaics with stone because her health was bad and she couldn't focus on little things. But stones were big enough that she could work with them. At Sangamon State I did take classes with Margaret Rossiter, who was a painter and art history instructor. I remember really liking her class, her art history classes.

Q. Ok, so you took some art history?

A. Yes there again...

Q. And some painting?

A. I have always really loved art history.

Q. Oh, you have?

A. Yes, I remember the first art history classes at University of Illinois when I was still a graphic design major learning about the Renaissance. This was all new to me at that time. So from Margaret Rossiter I learned about 19th century French art, which is about as good as it ever gets.

Q. Did sculpting ever interest you?

A. No, it didn't. I liked working with wood but mostly just like utilitarian type projects, building things.

Q. Sure. Maybe it was later, but Larry Shiner taught some courses. Do you know him?

A. I heard him lecture. He might have been even a guest lecturer, so I knew who he was. But I never had a formal class with him. Same with, I never had any classes with Bob Dixon either. He was always there in the art department. Mark Seibert with music, I just remember he had a group of recorder players that were very wonderful.

Q. Yes, right, Sangamon Consort or something.

A. Yes, that's what it was. I remember sketching them playing their recorders. That was fun and what else? I was just going to, just thought of something else I was going to mention.

Q. Any politics courses or issue-oriented courses?

A. Yes, I still can't remember what I was originally going to say, but one of the best classes I ever had was with Ron Sakolsky. It was called Jazz and Blues: Cultural Impact. I knew

something about music that I liked, but I had no concept of the history of going back to the slave chants and the New Orleans street funeral parades and all that.

I liked the way he taught because He would just let you explore an area of your interest and do a project on it. I remember doing lithographs for his class with just some scene I made up, musicians playing on the street in front of a tavern on 18th Street. I lived at 18th and Capitol and there was a tavern a couple blocks away called the Hi Dee Ho Club, and I think I used that in the art as a print.

I liked doing that also. I might have done some posters. I was doing posters for musical events, concerts. Did one for... I can't remember exactly. I remember doing sketches of some famous jazz saxophonist that played in Springfield, I can't remember his name.

Q. From Springfield?

A. No, he was probably from the east coast; Dexter Gordon was his name. He actually played in Europe for a long time.

Q. Sure.

A. There was a concert at the Holiday Inn, and I remember sketching it. I think the drawings appeared in the "Illinois Times." So during that period of early 1980s and the late 1970s, I was involved in that greater community around the university.

Q. At the, what's the bar around the, former school.

A. Oh, the Crow's Mill School?

Q. Yes, were you hanging around there much?

A. Oh, yes a lot. I did a lot of art for them, too. I did their first sign. I remember when Bob Sipe and Dick Durbin and those people were the owners and I can't remember the other guy's name who I know. I can picture him.

Q. Ron Ettinger.

A. Ron Ettinger, yes. He might have even been the one that hired me, but I did a sign outside that hung on a pole by the street. Then I did another sign that was a big, circular a motif that was on the building itself. I did posters for them and some menu design, things like that. That was a lot of fun; they were very supportive.

Q. So you found... I don't want to put words in your mouth, so I should put this back. Did you find in the university institution and its people, congenial?

A. Yes, very much.

Q. Crowd of intellectuals or artists or counter culture, I don't know.

A. Yes, it kept me in Springfield. The people were interesting and progressive thinkers. I think if the college hadn't of been here, I would have, probably would have moved away, moved to Champaign or someplace like that. I had lived in Madison, Wisconsin before in the early 1970s. I ended up, I can't remember if I said I moved to Wisconsin.

Q. Yes, in passing.

A. I mentioned it, but actually my friend Charlie Blanchard had moved up there.

Q. Oh, had he?

A. Yes, and because some friends of his had started this rock band, and I knew Lee Bush, Elliott Dellman. There were about five guys, and Lee Bush was from Springfield and knew Charlie in high school. Some of the other people were from Chicago or Champaign. They moved to southwest Wisconsin, which was a very beautiful, hilly, dairy country. Charlie said, "You'll love it up here and you should come visit. You've got to come see this place." So I just moved there on his recommendation.

In the summer of 1972 after I recovered from the hepatitis, I hung out with this rock band. They were called the Sky Farmer Band. They were trying to do a Grateful Dead jam band rural existence, and that was a lot of fun. Then I moved into Madison after that because I was just restless. The rural scene, it was I felt, I just felt I needed more stimulation, more people.

So I moved to Madison and spent a winter there, and I wasn't very happy. I never found any work, paying work. I did illustrations for an underground paper in Madison in 1972 and 1973, called "Takeover" They were a good group of people. They even were a little more politically radical than me and little more like SDS. I was more... I don't know, I was, I didn't feel that politics was the ultimate answer to life's questions, so I was not that hard core.

Q. Right, right.

A. I was always interested in the underground press, the possibilities for cartooning and making political observations through graphic means.

Q. I infer from what you've said that you didn't get involved in the politics on campus, I mean campus politics or even partisan politics on campus.

A. Not too much. I don't, I probably knew everybody that was involved.

Q. Larry Golden, did you know him?

A. Yes, I knew who he was for sure. Ron Sakolsky was a big influence on me. After I split up with my wife, he... which was in the fall of 1979, he offered me a place to stay at his house out on the New City Road. I'd known him for a few years before that when he used to live on Old Jacksonville Road. He'd lived in a couple of places in the country and so he said he had an extra room in his house.

I ended up moving in with my two small children because I took the custody and I cared for them when I split up from my wife. They were one and three-years-old, so we moved out there. Then he was living with a woman whose name was Qothy, and she spelled it QOTHY, very eccentric spelling. Some things she just made up for herself, and she had two small kids. They were like four and five-years-old.

Ron had a daughter from his marriage who was about eight-years-old, Natasha was her name. So there were a lot of kids there and it was a stimulating, very stimulating environment. I lived there for a year and then moved back into this house, 945 S. 1st in 1980.

Q. You own this house?

A. My dad bought it and rented the first floor to me for ten or fifteen years. Then he gave it to me. Gradually and over a period of time, I became the owner.

Q. Ok, that's a nice area actually.

A. Yes, it's close to the state capitol, close to the downtown, and it's a really solidly built house.

Q. You've read a lot of course. Did you take any literature courses when you were at the university?

A. No, none.

Q. Or history, you didn't take any of Mick Johnston's classes?

A. No, I didn't take any history at all. I pretty much... like I said going to the University of Illinois Champaign, so I had had a lot of these basic requirements of rhetoric. I don't remember what else I took over there. I took some history over there. So by the time I transferred to Sangamon State, I already had about seventy or eighty credit hours. So really all I needed was my art major hours.

Q. You didn't have to take public affairs courses or anything like that?

A. No, they had those classes, you had to do a project.

Q. Yes.

A. A public affairs type, I can't remember what they called it. It wasn't work study, it was...

Q. Applied Study?

A. Applied Study. Ok, that's it. That was a great opportunity actually for me because at one point, somebody said, "Well you ought to do a book for your drawings." It might have even been Robert Crumb, a great cartoonist that I was corresponding with. I thought, "Well yes, I would love to do a book, but I just don't know how to do it."

This applied study term really helped me because I said, "Yes, that's what I wanted to do." I think Rosie Roach was the counselor, the person I was working with the applied study. She gave me a lot of encouragement, and I got the mechanics together to do it. I had these plates made up; I did the printing myself; printed 500 copies so it was an oversized portfolio of forty pages long.

Q. Sure, my gosh.

A. Bound it myself. Produced the entire thing myself, and sold them down at Shadid's Book Mart, sold every single copy I made.

Q. Isn't that interesting. What was it called? Is it just a portfolio?

A. It was called "Springfield, Illinois, a collection of 44 pen and ink drawings by William Crook, Jr.," and that was about 1981 when it first came out. Then that's about when I got my degree in 1981, 1982.

Q. Let's stop a moment; I have to flip it (the tape).

[End Tape 1, Side 1]

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Q. This is the continuation of an oral history interview with William Crook, Jr. on June 7th. You were talking about another friend.

A. I was going to say when I was at Sangamon State I also did cartoons for the student newspaper, which it may have been called something different. It was the Prairie Star, the Prairie Comet; I don't know what it was called.

Q. It went through a number of...

A. But I think that at one point the editor was Ray Long, and I did political cartoons for the student newspaper. I don't know if they were even political. I tried different styles. I

remember one was a Doonesbury style cartoon and some were just single panels, some were surrealist. I didn't, I was looking to find a voice, which I don't think I ever really found. But I remember Ray Long who went on to be a reporter for the... I don't know what, Chicago Tribune.

Q. Chicago Tribune, yes.

A. He's still around.

Q. Sure, he covers statehouse politics, nice guy.

A. Yes, he's married to Peggy Boyer.

Q. You know her, too?

A. I know I did work for her. I know she was with "Illinois Issues", but that was a little bit later, that was around the 1990s. I've known her a long time. I've known a lot of people around the capitol building. I started doing some illustrations down there about 1975 and 1976, too.

Q. On commission?

A. Yes, for the magazine called "Illinois Issues."

Q. Oh, of course.

A. When it first started, just the first year they were in existence I did four pen and ink drawings for covers for them; varying degrees of success because I was still just starting out.

Q. Right.

A. I've had some work in some subsequent issues, probably later when Peggy became the editor.

Q. Well, Mike Lennon was involved. Did you know him?

A. I knew who he was, but I don't, no I really don't remember him.

Q. Trying to think of any other, how about university events that might have been of interest to you, speakers?

A. There's one thing that came to mind. Mike Townsend helped organize an event called the Blacks, Whites, and Blues Festival.

Q. Right.

A. It was held over by the Hay Homes, and I remember doing a poster for them probably around 1980, late 1970s. They asked me to do a poster, and that turned out for some Blues stuff.

Q. I remember one, but that may not be the one you're talking about, striking portrait, I mean a striking poster.

A. I have no idea if that's the one I did or not. Yes, the university supported that. It was a really nice event. Brought the east side community, which living in Springfield my whole life I never went there, but I remember it was interesting. I remember going to this one. They had it every year.

So one of these years, I was sketching over there and some kid said, "Draw my picture, draw my picture." So I drew him in my sketchbook, and then years later I looked at the drawing and I had written the name of the person and it was Kevin Gamble. He went on to be a very famous basketball player.

Q. Great guy. Isn't that interesting.

A. So I drew a picture of him when he was about nine-years-old.

Q. Now you had mentioned graduation, which was in what year?

A. I don't know exactly. It was about 1982 because I didn't attend the graduation ceremony itself.

Q. Ok, you didn't. Really?

A. No, I had a policy against it. I thought it was, I didn't think it was a merited ceremony. But it was anticlimactic because I had already been to the University of Illinois and so I just got the requirements done one at a time and it was no big flourish to say, "Oh, I'm finally done."

Q. Well, having a degree hasn't particularly affected your ability to succeed in artist...

A. Well, after I went to Sangamon State, I had a girlfriend that said, "You ought to go to graduate school." So I did, I applied to Illinois State University and it was the only school I applied to and I got accepted into the printmaking program, which I really was, I hate to say it, unprepared for because they had a big high-powered printmaking program.

I had just gone to Sangamon State and somehow didn't know all the lab techniques and felt inferior and ended up dropping out of printmaking and went into painting, the painting program, which I had no background in it at all. I never done painting but yet the painters were wide open, they didn't care.

Q. Printmaking is technique.

A. Yes, printmaking it's all technique on the college level. I ended up switching to painting. I had a really good drawing instructor, but he really didn't like any of the drawings I did. He said, "You're work gives me a headache, stop doing the pen and ink." He hated the pen and ink. So I stopped doing it and worked in charcoal or whatever, whatever he wanted me to do. But I started doing watercolors and somehow got through the, got a master's degree with an emphasis in painting.

Q. Ok.

A. Then to complete the degree requirements, I ended up finally getting my master's thesis done because I got offered a teaching job at the Jacksonville Correction Center.

Q. Yes, I just turned it on. So Bob Hanie was another acquaintance there?

A. I didn't really know him at the university at UIS or whatever; I don't know when they changed the name. But I met him on the street in downtown Springfield when I was drawing I remember it was Capitol Avenue. It was probably about 1989, and I was doing a street scene.

He came up and said, "I'm doing these programs for the Lincoln Institute," I think he called it. He'd been, I think, a geology professor but he also had a background in theology from Georgia. He came to Sangamon State with a college president who had succeeded Spencer, can't remember his name.

Q. Alex Lacy.

A. Alex Lacy, who came from Georgia and brought Hanie with him. That was when Carter was Governor down there. They were interesting, and Hanie was a real visionary guy. But I think they let him go when Lacy left, or he never got tenure.

But anyway, he decided to stick around Springfield and started these programs for kids, for east side kids. He'd take anybody; he had these crazy visionary programs like he took kids to Russia. He was in contact with Gorbachev, trying to arrange this cultural exchange and you'd always think, "This is never going to work." But about half the time, they actually did work. I remember he took the son of a friend of mine. Bob Sloan had a son named Josh Sloan, and he took Josh to Oxford for a summer program, and it didn't cost Josh anything. Bob Hanie got the money somehow.

So my two kids got involved with Bob Hanie's programs and although, they never quite succeeded as well as he hoped they would. But they always did something, and they were amazingly successful at educating kids. He took a busload of kids to Pine Ridge, South Dakota,

to the Sioux Reservation there and it changed my son's life. He was only fifteen-years-old, my son Tim so this would have been in the early 1990s or something like that.

My son just got exposed to all these, I mean the kids he went to, the east side black kids, teenage girls and so forth. The Indian Reservation itself affected him and opened the eyes to this humanity that lived with people from different backgrounds. So that was really neat.

Q. Yes, he was a fascinating guy. One expedition west, to... who was the cartographer?

A. The Bodmer Expedition.

Q. Yes, yes.

A. He retraced the Bodmer Expedition out to Bismarck, North Dakota or someplace like that. He'd do something like that every year. I helped teach at one of these summer camp programs.

[Pause in recording]

Q. We're back recording, and I think we're getting close I think here. You did talk, you wanted to talk about Bob Hanie and you have.

A. So what Bob Hanie said, "Bill, you should... I teach at the Jacksonville Correction Center, a great opportunity for you." So I went and I finished up my master's degree. I think I started teaching on the understanding that I had, that my master's degree would be forthcoming quickly. So that was my emphasis to finally finish my master's thesis.

I had probably written it twice and got it kicked back to me twice. I was mad at them, but I hung in there and got it finished, got it officially approved. I taught at the Jacksonville Correctional Center for eleven years in art. Bob taught geology there and earth sciences and ended up dying there of a heart attack right in front of his class when he was fifty-seven-years-old. He collapsed.

Q. He never looked very healthy.

A. But he'd already had open heart surgery. The Jacksonville Hospital calls me up and says, "I understand you're a friend of Bob Hanie's, and he's on life support here." So I went over there and said goodbye to him; he was hooked up to tubes in the hospital. It was quite moving.

He basically had a brother who was like an airline pilot or something, but he was just... they came and cleaned out his apartment and that was it. It was very sad because he was a really good guy, and he died quite young.

Q. But you probably enjoyed it, and that paid reasonably well didn't it in Jacksonville?

A. It was a contract; the state had the best of intentions when they started out, but I never got a raise once in eleven years. They finally just cancelled the whole program; I had a great supervisor and his name was Cliff McRoy. He was a delight to work with; the whole place was great until the end. Then they had a new governor and a new director of corrections and new wardens, and they kept clamping down.

Then at some point you couldn't even, everything had to be like G-rated so then it was like you can't even really teach art anymore. So then they just said, "It's all over." I also taught for Lincoln Land Community College at some of these outreach campuses; Taylorville for several years, Beardstown for several years, Jacksonville, and that was always unsatisfactory because it seemed I always had new supervisors, some bad classrooms, bad facilities, so it didn't... I gave that up; I haven't taught for about five years.

Q. But your own work sustained you.

A. Yes, it... something sustains me and contact with other artists. One of my best friends died last year, Bob Waldmire. He was a huge influence on me in the early 1970s and kept in touch, visited every chance we had. He got me interested in Route 66, and I did some Route 66 art the past year. It hasn't sold too well, but maybe I haven't hit the right market for it. It's not interesting to everybody, but there are people all over the world that are interested in it.

Q. I was in a tiny little village in Tuscany, Italy, my wife and I were and there was a bar called Route 66 Bar.

A. That's funny, yes. Other ones you see, in Germany, yes.

Q. Well, we probably ought to wrap this up. I've taken up a lot of your time, but I have a couple of questions. First, you mentioned the donations of your own work in two stages; one in the 1980s and then more recently.

A. Right.

Q. You felt that the university was an appropriate repository for that work?

A. I thought, yes I thought they could take better care of it than I would. I just had a flood in my basement ten days ago, so it proves that point that they take very good care of things out there. Anything I have here is subject to fire, floods, all kinds of... insect damage.

Q. You obviously can get access to it. Can you actually if you were asked to... these other, would Tom Wood?

A. I don't know. I didn't give them any original art. I span the gap between fine art and just commercial illustrations and printmaking and so there's, a lot of my work is created on paper, multiple copies, so I just gave them prints. I've probably done over a hundred different prints.

A lot of them, at least twenty-five or thirty are of the state capitol alone, several were of the House [of Representatives] Chamber and the Blagojevich impeachment proceedings. I will continue to give them copies. I made a list, I typed up a list of everything I do including note cards. I have a lot of different formats I work in from large to small. I plan to just keep giving them one copy of everything I do.

Q. Well, you had some good experiences at the university. You can't really claim that it was the central force in your development as a professional artist, but you must have some memories about it.

I don't want to get a... here because I'm a historian. After all, this is an alumni association project, but candor is really important to me. How would you describe in retrospect your relationship with the university?

A. It really worked well for me at the stage of life I was in because when I was... I was maybe twenty-nine or thirty when I started taking classes there and it was like the opposite of U of I. It was very intimate. You had a class of maybe five or six people there and basically you had a very personal relationship with your professors. It worked perfect for me. I was... I liked the social justice aspect that pervaded the whole campus that made working for a better future and not just trying to get job skills.

Q. So it suited your own values and politics, I guess.

A. Yes, yes, my politics are the politics of the whole earth catalog, and it's back to the land, green politics. I've been on the Executive Committee of the Sierra Club for over twenty years and that's where my politics are. I'm not an anarchist or even a Democrat. I am a little bit of... my parents. I mean I'm not really thinking I was going to change the world or have anything new, but I like ideas and truths.

Q. This reminds me because I know you're interested in ecology and the environment, none of that was supported or inspired by your work at Sangamon State, was it?

A. No, I knew people out there like Dan Knapp who had an urban homesteading curriculum. I thought those guys were doing great stuff. I never took a class from him, but it was just in the air. Everybody was just... I remember raising chickens back in 1973 over there on the east side of Springfield. I remember there was Steve Brown and maybe a few other people. I thought Sangamon State was great for Springfield because it gave us a little liberal intellectual community, where people could get together and have parties and talk and cultural events, films, speakers, very stimulating just to have in the area.

It affected me if not as a primary source of who I became, definitely it helped keep me in Springfield, helped me make a lot of personal friends that I still keep in contact with. Ron Sakolsky lives in Denman Island, British Columbia and we went to Mexico last February. I

invited Ron and his partner, Sheila, to come and visit us in Mexico and they did. We spent a couple of weeks together in some little villages on the Pacific coast.

He publishes a little magazine at May Day called the "Oyster Catcher" out of his home in Denman Island, and it comes out every spring. He just sent me a copy recently. In fact, he had one of my drawings of Bob Waldmire in there accompanying a poem he wrote about Bob Waldmire. We still keep in touch.

Q. Well, I think this is probably very nice, and I appreciate this, Bill. This is exactly what I had hoped to get from you.

A. Good. Yes, it's good.

68 minutes 25 seconds

End of Interview